

Teacher dies in Front clashes

Peter Chippindale and Aileen Ballantyne

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A schoolteacher died early today after receiving severe head injuries in a violent demonstration against a National Front election meeting in Southall Middlesex.

He was Mr **Blair Peach**, a New Zealander in his late twenties who lived in East London. He died after an operation in Ealing Hospital.

The dead man, an Anti-Nazi League supporter, was one of 40 taken to hospital after the demonstration in which 300 people were arrested.

The violence which began in the afternoon came to head when rocks, smoke bombs, bottles and cans were hurled at the massive cordon of police protecting the Front meeting at Southall Town Hall.

Of the injured, 35 were policemen. One was stabbed in the stomach and another suffered a serious leg wound. Twenty police needed hospital treatment and six were detained.

The battle before the meeting was quelled only when police horsemen and police armed with riot shields charged the crowd.

Ealing Council, which had previously banned National Front meetings, allowed the Front to book the hall under the Representation of the People Act. It is a small room which used to be used as the council chamber when Southall was an independent borough.

The Front plans to hold a meeting tonight in Dr David Owen's Plymouth Devonport constituency. Police chiefs are today considering their strategy in light of last night's demonstration.

The Anti-Nazi league called for an immediate public inquiry into the action of police at Southall.

Mr Paul Holborrow, the League's national secretary said Mr Peach was one of their 35,000 supporters throughout Britain.

"We believe that this tragedy occurred solely because of the determination of the police to enable the Nazis to hold their racist and provocative meeting in the centre of the Asian community in Southall" he said.

"The ANL has repeatedly warned of the dangers of allowing Nazis to practise in our midst, now that the ultimate price has been paid in one man's death, it now asks how much longer this Nazi-provoked violence is to be tolerated in British politics."

Vishnu Sharma, the president of the Indian Workers' Association, Southall, said in a statement that "if anyone would have liked to see the police state in total operation he should have been in Southall today."

He said thousands of police blocked all roads to Southall Town Hall, where the National Front was allowed to hold their meeting by the Ealing Council tonight with the help of police force."

The statement said the IWA strongly condemned the "police repression" in Southall and demanded immediate release of all those arrested.

He said the IWA would set up an independent panel of eminent lawyers to investigate the incident. It requested people to come forward to give evidence before the panel. Mr Merlyn Rees, the Home Secretary, speaking before the man's death last night defended the right to hold meetings.

He said matters of public order had to be left to the professionals- the police - and it was not up to a Home Secretary to make judgements.

But if Labour were returned to power he would want more powers to control marches.

Interviewed by ITN, Mr Rees was asked what plans he had to deal with the kind of unpleasant aspects of extremism which had been seen recently.

Mr Rees said : "One thing that is absolutely sure in my mind over my responsibility is that the request for dealing with a march must come from the police. It must come from the Commissioner in London or it must come from the chief constable. There is only one person to make the judgement on public order grounds."

"It was a police judgement that was made in Leicester. There was no such judgement to make today simply because it was not a march. It was a meeting this evening and what happened this afternoon was not a march that had been requested in the normal fashion: people have gone there from all parts of the country."

Those arrested last night were held on charges ranging from assault on police to possessing offensive weapons. The number of police on duty was not being officially announced, but some eye witness reports were putting the figure at about 4,000, including about 100 mounted officers.

Mr Jim Jardine, the chairman of the Police Federation said he was appalled by the violence which followed so swiftly the weekend clashes in Leicester where 23 policemen were injured.

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